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THE HADHRAMI BEDOUIN LEGION

By A. M. CLARK HUTCHISON

701 DURING the past year the Jordan Arab Legion has been much in the news. Its activities in Iraq and Syria in the world war, its picturesqueness, and the fact that of all the Arab forces operating in Palestine the Legion was the only one to gain successes, have all helped to focus attention on it. Not so many people, however, have heard of the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion, a small local security force in the eastern part of the Aden Protectorate. This force, no more than a miniature army, is modelled on the Arab Legion.

579 721 643 Ten years ago in that area of the Aden Protectorate known as the Hadhramaut conditions were far from peaceful. Although the two leading rulers in the country, the Sultan of the Qu'aiti State of Shihr and Mukalla and the Kathiri Sultan in Seiyun, exercised certain control and powers over their lands, nevertheless there existed in adjacent regions and frequently within their own boundaries much raiding, looting, and inter-tribal quarrelling. Trade was at a standstill. Camel convoys were attacked, such roads as existed were often cut, and personal risk to a traveller was serious. All hopes of progress or agricultural development were reduced to nothing.

648 728 Britain was already in protectorate treaty relationship with the Sultans, but no political work had been undertaken in the area which was far from Aden. Air communications improved the outlook, and in the winter of 1936-37, as a result of careful planning and much detailed political work on the spot, the tribes great and small agreed to make peace and adjustments, required by all, were made concerning property, blood money, and other rights.*

648 At this point His Majesty's Government, on the advice of its representatives in the area, decided that a policy of assisted development was desirable, and adviser treaties were welcomed by the Sultans.

185 625 701 From this time on the civil administration was to gain in power and respect. The police and local military formations already in existence were inadequate for use in areas nominally under close state control. Their reorganization was undertaken with Indian N.C.O.s, and for use in the Bedouin areas Mr. W. H. Ingrams proposed the raising of a new force. After studying the organization of the Transjordan Arab Legion, and with the co-operation of Glubb Pasha, who arranged the loan of N.C.O.s, he raised the new force on January 1, 1940, and named it the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion. With the exception of the period from June, 1940, to March, 1942, he remained in control of the force and its development until June, 1944, when it had forts in the more important Bedouin areas and an educational system which included boarding-schools for Bedouin boys and girls.

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113 * Cf. Harold Ingrams, *Arabia and the Isles* (London, John Murray, 1942), pp. 243 ff.

As with the Arab Legion, the primary functions of the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion are to assist in the keeping of law and order and the propagation of the ideas and policy of Government by peaceful means whenever its members come in contact with the tribes and Bedouin in the interior. For these reasons its man-power is drawn from far and wide, but because of the prevailing illiteracy of the Bedouin population the senior officers are provided on secondment from the Arab Legion, and considerable help and supervision is given by a British Army officer, who is attached to the staff of the British Resident Adviser (the senior British civil officer at Mukalla) as Military Assistant. In its nine years of existence the H.B.L. has amply fulfilled expectations, and by the end of this year its numbers should reach 9 officers and 330 other ranks, while the whole cost will not exceed £29,000.

Competition to be enlisted is keen, and the authorities can hand-pick their recruits, preferring those whose families have a certain standing in their tribes, thereby giving the future soldier a measure of authority to speak in and for his tribe. The clearest method of describing the day-to-day life of the Legion is to trace the course of the new recruit from time of entry to date of discharge. The individual who presents himself at the headquarters in Mukalla for enlistment will be somewhat uncouth in appearance, rather short in stature, and spare in build. Experts in the local physiognomy and dress may be able to tell from which tribe he comes, as there are small but traceable differences between each. His dress will consist of a loincloth or short *futa*, black or dark blue, into which is thrust a *jambiyah*, a short knife in a curved scabbard. His hair will be long, kept in place with a twist of cloth, and both hair and short beard will be plentifully oiled; his body may be covered with indigo. Many of the Bedouin are good-looking in a small-featured, feminine way, which is emphasized by their bobbed-length hair. Some have tribal scars on their faces, and most wear amulets round their necks and bracelets above their elbows, both made from silver and set with cornelian. He is unlikely to bring his rifle with him, although he may well own one, probably of the antiquated French make and possibly dating as far back as 1870.

When transformed into a private in the H.B.L. he will retain his long hair and silver ornaments, but will be quite different otherwise. Over shorts he wears a khaki *qamīs*, a calf-length one-piece garment with a shirt top. Round his waist is a leather ammunition belt, under which he wears, on ceremonial occasions, a broad red webbing sash with long ends. On his head is a khaki *kafiyah* with black head-rope, or *'iqāl*, and the silver badge of the H.B.L. in front. A *kafiyah* is seldom worn in the Hadhramaut, and the soldier off duty is prone to twist and wind it turban-wise round his head.

On being accepted the recruit swears to be loyal and faithful to H.M. King George, his heirs and successors, and to obey the orders of all officers set over him. He also agrees to abide by H.B.L. standing orders, the Army Act of his force, but does not sign on for any specified period and is free to leave at three months' notice. Now comes the barrack square, weapon training, guard procedure, and drill. At the end of the first month he receives 22 rupees (33s.), the pay of a private soldier. This,

702 taking into consideration rations and clothing, is good money in the
701 Hadhramaut, and is sufficient for a soldier's tobacco and personal needs and to maintain a wife and family. Unlike his British counterpart, he does not have to undergo a rigid medical examination, nor is he likely to suffer from the dentist, but if he should fall ill he is treated by the unit medical orderly or a civilian doctor, and provision is made for his admittance to the civil hospital in Mukalla if need arises.

712 At the end of recruit training a soldier will be sent to one of the posts
701 in the interior, and here the discipline and character-training already undergone will be continued. Some of these posts are sited where desert tracks cross, others near disputed wells or in areas where the tribes have
[342] proved recalcitrant. Sometimes local houses are requisitioned, and as Hadhrami architecture derives from the need for security these high, small-based, mud-brick houses are not unlike forts in themselves. In other localities proper small-scale forts have been built, square in shape and enclosing a well in the courtyard, resembling the smaller Palestine police posts or Arab Legion forts. Usually built with towers at two diagonally opposite corners, they have an imposing entrance gate, storerooms and sleeping quarters below, and above two rooms and a balcony encircling the fort. In commanding position, they would fill admirably the requirements of a producer of the *Beau Geste* type of film. From their posts the H.B.L. patrol on foot, perform guard duties, and if necessary provide escorts. Life in an outpost may appear dull, but reliefs are
[212] regular, and in his spare time a soldier is wise to learn to read and write, as without these accomplishments he is debarred from promotion above the rank of corporal. Any day a row of four or five soldiers may be observed at the unusual task of laborious reading or writing under the guidance of an officer or N.C.O.

701 Generally the presence of soldiers in an area has a deterrent effect on
721 any potential law-breakers or tribal raiders, and by mixing with the local Bedouin, and by reason of being themselves Bedouin, they do much to assist Government by explanation and advice. When trouble does occur, minor operations may have to be undertaken to deal with the offenders. During these infrequent periods the soldier receives his best training, and the prospect of more active duty always appeals to him. Although a natural fighter in his own type of warfare and country, the Bedouin is no match for his brother in the H.B.L., who has the advantage of superior leadership, better weapons, and a plentiful supply of ammunition. The expenditure of rounds, which do not have to be accounted for individually,
[619] is one of the soldier's greatest joys and entertainments. It may be wondered, if, on occasion, men enlisted from tribes which are hostile to each other carry this enmity with them into the force. Such is not the case, and once in the army they seem to lose their civilian opinions and prejudices and to forget past feuds. However, care is taken that soldiers of a tribe against which force is used are not employed on that task.

702 Militarily speaking, the Hadhrami Bedouin soldier is quick at drill, and, as practically all of them are born with a rifle in their hands, weapon training, even with light machine-guns, comes easily to them. They are not, however, such good shots as might be expected and have a universal Tendency to fire high.

tendency to fire high. Tactics are simple, usually an advance in strength or the investment or defence of small forts or houses. Any more complicated manœuvre involving strict timing or detailed concerted action would be beyond their capacity at present. They are difficult to control in action, and in the heat of the moment tend to forget their training and to expose themselves by not making use of ground and cover, but as their potential opponents suffer from the same faults this is not so serious as it would be against more experienced troops. The Bedouin does not favour night-fighting, but he is expert at moving and taking up position in the dark. He is willing to follow his officers, and has particular faith in those from the Arab Legion, who in simple fashion he believes must be more competent, as they have been brought in from another country. The same would apply to British officers, provided they understood his language and customs and accurately gauged his capabilities. Unless equipped with this knowledge, however, a British officer would find the Bedouin soldier awkward to handle and disappointing in action.

By showing promise and industry the soldier will gain promotion or can become a specialist such as wireless operator or armourer. At present the highest rank reached by any is lieutenant; owing to lack of experience, knowledge, and background, they are not yet suitable for higher rank, but in time this will be overcome. Part of the remedy may result from the foundation a few years ago of a Bedouin boys' school in Mukalla. This worth-while enterprise, sponsored and paid for by His Majesty's Government, is of considerable interest, and it is anticipated that ex-pupils will not only help to fill the ranks of H.B.L. with good material, but that others, encouraged to further education, will become much-needed Government servants, teachers and leaders in other walks of life.

There is a cadre of men who have voluntarily remained in the H.B.L. for longer periods, but after four years or so the average soldier, unless he has attained rank, will retire. He may ask that his place be taken by his brother or cousin, as he has liked the life, and his length of voluntary service speaks for itself. On his return to his tribe he will be an asset to Government, and his understanding and experience will be of help to political officers or other Government servants who may have dealings with his tribe or work to perform in his area. There is no reserve. The Bedouin in the Protectorate dislikes being tied down to a period of time, and a reserve as understood in a European army would be impossible to administer or co-ordinate. But in an emergency many ex-soldiers would return for temporary service if strongly requested.

Whatever the future may hold, there is no doubt that the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion performs useful tasks at low costs. It is in no sense planned as a national army, but in its military and political rôles has fully justified itself. One hopes that its ties with the Arab Legion will not be broken and that in the years to come it will attain the prestige and success in its own area which the Arab Legion enjoys in the Arab world as a whole.

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